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## The Teacher as a Modern Manager

Whenever a product is produced or a service rendered, those who do the actual task are called workers. Those who tell the workers what to do and often how to do it are called managers. Although it would be natural to consider teachers managers because they tell students what to do and how to do it, most teachers see themselves more as workers. This point of view is shared by school administrators and most of the general public. This is because we tend to look at students not as competent young people responsible for their own education, but as helpless, uneducated raw material who need the direct effort of a teacher if they are to learn anything at all. As a worker, it becomes the teacher's responsibility much more than the student's to make sure that students learn.

Teachers are also considered managers at least to the extent that they direct their students and use their power to reward or punish them to try to get them to follow this direction. As managers, they rarely go beyond this traditional managerial role of direct, reward or punish. Most teachers have given little thought to what managers might do that goes beyond this traditional concept because they perceive themselves much more as workers than managers and workers don't spend much time thinking about what managers can do. Until they begin to see themselves solely as managers and their students, not they, as workers, there will be little change in the amount of effort that most students now make in school. If we want more students to work, teachers must begin to see

themselves as modern managers, an expanded managerial concept explained in detail in this chapter.

Once a teacher begins to consider abandoning the worker role altogether, she will want to learn what she can do as a manager which goes far beyond the traditional concept of direct, reward and punish. For example, unlike traditional managers who spend little time worrying about whether the working conditions are satisfying, modern managers spend a lot of time structuring and restructuring the workplace to make it more satisfying because they believe that satisfied workers are much more productive.

As long as teachers see themselves mostly as workers, they will not accept the idea that it is their responsibility to restructure their teaching so that it is more satisfying. And to the limited extent that they now see themselves as managers, they are reluctant to give up the traditional way to manage because it does promise a lot of power. In practice, however, most teachers are well aware that it doesn't deliver on that promise. It is hard to feel powerful if at least half your students are paying little or no attention to what you are trying to teach, whether you are working or managing.

Most teachers (and parents), however, are not looking for vague new managerial concepts but for more tangible power, especially more power to punish. Led by s-r theory, they believe that with enough punishment students can be made to work and follow rules whether they want to or not. What teachers find especially hard to face is that even with the power they now have to threaten students, and in most schools to back up these threats with detention, demerits, notes to parents, corporal punishment, suspension and, above all, failure, at least half the students still won't work.

Schools cling to these ancient "stimuli" and look for more, not only because they do not know what else to do, but because punishment does seem to be effective with the half who are already working when they occasionally

get out of line. And since most teachers were in the working half when they were in school, they believe in punishment because they "remember" that it frightened them. They fail to realize that they, like students who are working now, were rarely punished because they saw the value of school and worked. If they got out of line, a word of warning would have been as or more effective as any threat of punishment.

When those who didn't work were punished, they usually dropped out and we didn't miss them. Today, even in the face of many threats and much punishment, many of the nonworkers stay in school because their friends are there. As members of the identity society, they pay little attention to threats or punishment: They are far too young and too secure to be convinced that their teachers can hurt them or that they won't survive without an education. To become more effective, teachers should give serious thought to restructuring the way they teach to some variation of the learning-team model suggested in the last chapter. This model, however, demands that they give up most of their traditional worker role for the new role of managing the learning-teams. To do this well, they would be wise to make an effort to learn to be a modern manager.

Once they become familiar with this new managerial role, they will be as much or more in charge as they are now, and in giving up the worker role, they will be more comfortable because they will see that they are not responsible for students who do not want to learn. But the more they act as facilitators, resource people and coaches, the more they will find that the students in learning-teams take much more responsibility than now for their own education. Teachers who are willing to make an effort to learn this new and much more powerful manager role will also find their jobs easier because as students begin to work harder, their work load will be substantially reduced.

The most difficult task for teachers who are trying to

learn to manage learning-teams is to understand the difference between *a modern manager*, who is willing to share power and is always on the lookout for better ways to do this, and *a traditional manager*, who never willingly gives up any power and is always looking for more. This seemingly simple distinction is not simple at all. It is the core of why so many students are failing to learn, just as it is central to the widely publicized financial difficulties that so many American businesses are struggling with today. This is brought out clearly in the first of a series of articles on business entitled "Restoring America's Competitive Edge" (*The Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1985). To quote from this article:

Having risen from bread kneader to chief executive of the Campbell Soup Co., Gordon McGovern in 1980 inherited a company truly in the soup. . . . If Campbell was to survive . . . McGovern says, "We had to get the company fractured up into small businesses, put people in charge and tell them to get busy." Like Campbell, hundreds of America's large corporations have been forced by external pressures into an urgent reassessment of how they do business. . . . "You can't do business these days," asserts General Motors Chairman Roger B. Smith, "the way you were organized before." Behind the giant doors that house some of the country's most staid and powerful businesses, a revolution is in the making. The anatomy of the big American corporation is being redesigned.

In the past, these companies, like schools which are directed by superintendents and principals, were run the traditional way—strictly from the top. Lower managers, like foremen, had little power beyond the power to threaten. With the rise of unions and laws to protect workers from threats, this power became minimal and lower managers—even many middle managers—began to consider themselves much more as workers responsible for taking orders and doing a job than as managers whose responsibility was (in McGovern's words) "to put people

in charge and tell them to get busy." As businesses have been forced by losses to take a look at how they are structured and how they distribute power, schools are also being forced by student failures to do the same. Unfortunately, what is being recommended to the schools is exactly the opposite of what is coming from the boardrooms of corporations.

The *Nation at Risk* report, which echoes the sentiments of many educators and parents, recommends that less power be given both to teachers and students to determine what and how to learn. Business, on the other hand, is increasingly moving to give more decision-making power to lower-level managers and even to workers. Managed by teachers, the small learning-teams that I recommend in this book follow closely what many businesses are now attempting: Redistribute the power to get more productivity. In schools more students will be working and learning. Certainly if business has rediscovered what has been known for centuries—the more that people have power over their own destiny, the harder and more creatively they work—it is time for schools to make this "discovery" too.

At the lowest level we think of a manager as directing the workers who actually produce the goods or services. For example, in the private sector, it is the job of the foreman in an auto factory to direct the workers who are building the cars; in a bank, the chief teller directs the tellers who work at the windows waiting on customers. In the public sector, it is the mail supervisor who directs the letter carriers, and in school we tend to think that the principal directs the teachers who are analogous to the letter carriers in the post office.

The problem with this widely held belief is that it is inaccurate and its inaccuracy is deleterious to productive learning. To increase the productivity of a school, it is better for the principal to act as a middle manager and for the teachers to act as managers also, perhaps, analogous to foremen. The students are the workers who produce both

the goods and services of the school. The finished goods of a school are students who start uneducated and finish as knowledgeable in either academics or vocations. The major services of a school are athletic events, concerts, plays, the school newspaper, the yearbook, etc. That students also learn as they play football or act in a play is obvious, but few students learn enough to classify these services as goods. By this I mean that as talented as many are, very few will become a good enough finished product to make their living in these fields, and no school board would consider cutting academics or vocational training to make more room for athletics, drama or music.

If a teacher begins to try to act less as a worker and more as a modern manager, she should be aware that in the beginning she is likely to be very uncomfortable in this unfamiliar role. This is mostly because she has to accept the hard fact that many managers at all levels find frustrating: She has no direct power to get a student to learn. Students, like all workers, will only work hard if they see that there is some benefit for them to do so. It is up to the manager to figure out how to *structure* the job so that they can see this benefit.

Let's take a look at auto workers for a moment. We know their work is even more routine than any student's. However, they will not sand smoothly or assemble well unless their job has been structured by their managers in such a way that they can see that they have some power over their destiny. They are not "living machines" to be ordered about and discarded when they do not perform. They want the corporation to succeed and will work hard if their managers will listen to what they believe will help the company to succeed. Unlike a corporation that must compete successfully or go bankrupt, as yet schools do not have to compete. They continue to be funded even when half or more of their students are not learning. How long this will continue I cannot predict, but if I were a teacher I would be very concerned about the low productivity of even our "better" schools.

Teachers who see themselves as workers tend to be unconcerned with their school's productivity and its ability to compete. The fact is, however, that schools have to compete, not only with private schools, but also with whatever is in the minds of politicians and taxpayers for what a good school should be. *The Los Angeles Times* (November 30, 1985) had a major story about three small Oregon communities that have closed their schools (temporarily, they hope) rather than pay more taxes. The politicians say that there is nothing they can do, but the taxpayers, only one third of whom have children in school, say the schools are not doing a good enough job to get their support. In a sense, these schools have gone temporarily bankrupt: The industrial comparison is not as far-fetched as many teachers want to believe.

Many public colleges, to keep their funding, are being forced to compete to attract enough students, and many parents are sending their children to private schools because they think these are better than public schools. If enough parents do this, they become a political force and pressure the government to pay tuition directly or in the form of tax benefits. There is already pressure in this direction, and if this movement gains momentum, it could change public education in ways that are difficult to predict. But one thing that would surely happen is that teachers would lose almost all the bargaining power for salaries and benefits that they have struggled so long to gain.

If teachers can accept the new role of manager that I believe will lead many more students to work harder in school, they still have the difficult task of finding out exactly what that role is and how to do it well. As our leading corporations are discovering, we have few good managerial models in the United States. In fact, compared to the distressingly high output of shoddy goods and unsatisfactory services produced by our high-wage commercial sector, many of our schools are not doing that badly.

Industrial experts who have studied the problems of low productivity all point to the same basic problem:

There is nothing inherently defective in the American worker (or, I claim, the American student). What is lacking is effective management. Teachers, therefore, cannot look to the private sector or to other public sectors for many models of good management, but these models do exist and much can be learned from them.

Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers and a recognized expert on education, has put a lot of thought into school management. In an article entitled "The Right—and Wrong—Ways to Improve Schools" carried as a paid advertisement in *The New York Times* (February 3, 1985), he pinpoints school management as the crucial factor in the future success of our schools and outlines an approach that should be satisfying to both students and teachers. Although his article is aimed more toward superintendents and principals, it seems to me to be as much or even more applicable to the most crucial managers in the schools, teachers.

Rather than paraphrase, I will quote directly from Shanker, who starts by saying:

All across the country we're busy trying to improve American education. How? By applying the techniques commonly used by American business management—frequent evaluations to find out who is doing a poor job, career ladders and merit pay to award the productive worker and easier dismissal for the weak and incompetent. But will it work? Does it work in the private sector?

There's no question that attracting and retaining high quality teachers is indeed very important. If you don't have competent people nothing is going to help. But, even with them, will the schools improve if they're managed—by a sort of carrot-and-stick approach to employees? Before we impose this system on American schools, shouldn't we at least listen to the critics who say that this type of management is what has made American industry a failure in comparison with our Japanese counterparts?

For over a quarter of a century, W. Edwards Deming



told American business that unless it changed its approach to productivity and quality, the economy would be destroyed. Unfortunately, no one was listening. Deming had gone to Japan in 1950, invited the 45 top industrialists to come to a meeting and told them about his methods of producing high quality goods at a lower cost. The story of "Deming's Way" is told in an article under that title by Myron Tribus in the Spring 1983 issue of *New Management*, a quarterly publication of the Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Southern California. Tribus is director of the Center for Advanced Engineering Study at M.I.T. and formerly vice president for research and engineering at Xerox as well as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for science and technology.

Within six weeks of Deming's visit, Tribus writes, *some of the industrialists reported productivity gains of as much as 30% without purchasing any new equipment. But in spite of the fact that Deming's way has worked, American managers travel to Japan, marvel at the behavior of factory workers, and conclude that it is something inherent in Japanese culture. The managers come home convinced that it is not their fault. They blame their problems on the American workers, on taxes, on regulation, on the decay of society—in short, on anything except their own management philosophies. . . . They do not realize that Deming has developed an entirely new concept of how to manage systems of machines and people.*

In the next paragraph, Shanker describes first the American philosophy of management and then the Japanese approach following Deming. As you read, substitute in your mind the word *teacher* for American manager and you will get a picture of what goes on now in many classrooms that is so unsatisfying to so many students.

What are the different approaches? The American manager aims to *run the company as profitably as he can and*

*to expand its business. . . . The American idea of a good manager is one who sets up a system, directs the work through subordinates and, by making crisp and unambiguous assignments, develops a set of standards of performance for his employees. He sets goals and production targets for his people. He rates the employees as objectively as he can. He identifies poor performers and gives them further education to meet standards, or he replaces them. He hopes thereby to create the most efficient system possible.*

Let me paraphrase the previous paragraph in terms of what the average teacher does in the traditional classroom when she attempts to act both as a worker and a manager. The traditional American teacher sets up her class her way, directs all the work, makes clear and unambiguous assignments, develops the standards of student performance, sets goals and grades all work as objectively as she can. She identifies poor students and either works to give them special help or fails them to get rid of them. She believes that this is the best way to teach.

Here you can see that if teachers try to act as managers but use the American managerial model, they will tend to make the same mistakes that our managers have made for years and which have dropped us so far behind the Japanese.

Now let us see what Shanker has to say about Deming and the Japanese managers who follow his lead:

*The manager who follows Deming's way sees his job as providing consistency and continuity of purpose for his organization, and seeking ever more efficient ways to achieve this purpose. For him, making a profit is necessary for survival but it is by no means the main purpose. The basic purpose of his organization is to provide the best and least-cost (product) for his customers and continuity of employment for his workers. He does not view the concepts of "best" and "least-cost" as contradictory.*

To paraphrase this paragraph in terms of the teacher who would manage the new control theory team model using management techniques suggested by Deming:

She would see that she had to provide a consistent explanation of the purpose of the subject that she is teaching and share with her students the idea that they should think about what they are learning and try to help her to find the most efficient ways for them to learn. She would try to get the best grades on the standardized tests, but she would realize that these tests were by no means the main purpose of what she was trying to achieve. She would encourage students to figure out the easiest way to learn so that they could use their time to learn more and would not think that a student who figured out an easy way, for example, to use a computer, learned less than students who had expended much more effort to learn the same amount.

Now to go on to the next paragraph in Shanker's article:

*This manager, writes Tribus, believes that he and the workers have a natural division of labor: They are responsible for doing the work within the system and he is responsible for improving the system. He realizes that the potentials for improving the system are never ending, so he does not call upon consultants to teach him how to design the "best" system. He knows that doesn't exist. Any system can be continuously improved. And the only people who really know where the potentials for improvement lie are the workers themselves.*

To paraphrase this paragraph in terms of what the new teacher-manager might do if she followed Deming's model:

She is clear in her mind what her job is and what the students are to do. She is basically responsible for the structure of the class and they are responsible to work in that structure. She is also continually responsible for improving the structure and she believes that it can always

be improved: There is no best structure. But rather than look to outside "experts" to show her how to design the unachievable "best" system, she turns to the students who are working within the system and asks them for feedback. She knows that more than anyone else they know how to improve it, but she must set up a method to hear from them. Then, by taking some of their suggestions, she shows them that what they offer has value. In this way, more than anything else she can do she gives them a sense of power and in no way diminishes her own.

Shanker goes on to say:

Tribus notes that under the Deming approach, everyone in the system is involved in studying it and proposing how to improve it, each person spending 5% of the time doing this. He writes, *"The employees will then view the setting of work standards a dumb idea, since it inhibits their ability to IMPROVE the system. They will not need to manage by objectives because they will be engaged in constantly redefining the objectives themselves, and recording the performance of the system."* And, most important, workers and managers alike will find that, in most systems, 80 to 85% of the problems are with the system and 15 to 20% are with the worker. This is an important fact to understand, for it frees workers to speak out without fear, a quality which the Deming manager assiduously cultivates.

To continue to paraphrase, the role of the teacher in the control theory team school would be one in which:

The teacher and the students would engage in a continual examination of how the subject is taught and time will be specifically set aside to do this. There would be a real effort to do away with preconceived notions and actively enlist the help of the students in working to improve the process. From the start she would see that it is the classroom structure, not the students, which is the cause of most of the problems. Because she does not see the students as problems, she will encourage them to

speak out. Threats and punishment would give way to cooperation in trying to get the most out of each course.

Shanker continues:

Under Deming's way, the manager understands that he needs the workers not only to do the work, but to improve the system. Thus he will not regard them simply as flesh and blood robots, but as thinking, creative human beings. No one will have to teach him to be nice to people. He will not try to motivate with empty slogans—such as *Zero Defects*—because workers will be measuring and counting the defects themselves and helping to remove them. He will not ask them to sign pledges to be polite to customers. Nor will he select the “Polite Trucker of the Week” award. Instead he and the workers will study the records of repeat orders and ask what they can do to improve the statistics.

To paraphrase:

~~Teachers will understand that they need students; there will be none of the adversary power struggle that is so destructive in the standard classroom. There will be no phony awards or slogans like “back to basics” or “excellence in education” to try to motivate. Since the students are part of the process, they will constantly be looking for ways to improve it. Most important, when any team discovers a new and more effective way to learn, this knowledge will be shared with everyone so that all can learn more.~~

Shanker concludes:

Deming's way of management and the Japanese success with it over more than 30 years demonstrate that improving systems improves quality, even with an existing work force and existing equipment. Will American schools adopt the old American business model of train-evaluate-reward-punish . . . or will they take the path that enabled the Japanese to swamp their American competitors? Nobody knows, and nothing's guaranteed. Here's

how Tribus described how Deming must have felt over the quarter of a century that U.S. industry ignored his warnings: *The ultimate curse is to be a passenger on a large ship, to know that the ship is going to sink, to know precisely what to do to prevent it, and to realize that no one will listen.*

From this, the final paraphrase is clearly that:

**What is most needed in the schools is not new personnel or equipment but a new philosophy and a new structure for using what we have. To go on the same way with more and more students refusing to work is to set a course for waste and ultimate bankruptcy. Anyone who is involved with our secondary schools can see that they are headed for the rocks, but will anyone listen long enough to consider that it is worth trying a different way?**

To implement these ideas of Deming's in a school through the learning-team model makes good sense from a management standpoint. There may be other models, but any model that does not lend itself to the teacher acting as a modern manager who looks for ways to share her power will probably not work. This should not be difficult to do. It should be easier in a school than in a factory for two important reasons:

1. There is no financial risk. These ideas will cost no more than is already being spent for the low productivity we have now.

2. Unlike a factory, in a school these ideas can be introduced slowly—class by class. There is no need to try to shift the whole school from the traditional model to this or any other new model until it has been successfully demonstrated in selected classes.

Finally, the teacher needs to act as a modern manager because the traditional management model was never designed for the in-depth learning that is necessary if today's students are to escape boredom and relate knowledge to power. There is no more real power working by yourself

answering workbook questions or getting the right answer to simple math problems than there is in attacking a seam of coal with a pick and shovel. Modern management was developed because in our technical society jobs are complex and interdependent, and if our learning does not keep pace, students have little preparation for work or life.

You can't tell a single aerospace engineer or computer programmer either how to produce a good product or to do it quickly or be discharged because what he does is dependent on so many others that unless the whole process is skillfully managed nothing is accomplished. Even coal miners now run multimillion-dollar mining machines whose progress and maintenance is continually monitored by computer. As you read the in-depth examples of the assignments given to the learning-teams in the next chapter, you will see that what these teachers are doing is acting as modern managers. They are not pushing or threatening; they are thinking of the best way for students to learn and are facilitating the process by giving as much power to the students as they can handle and always encouraging them to take more. There will be no doubt in your mind that these students are well aware that knowledge is power and that both they and their teacher enjoy these assignments. If there is a key to successful modern managing, it is that both the managers and the workers enjoy what they do and do it well.